United Nations E/C.19/2003/4

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 March 2003

Original: English

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second session
New York, 12-23 May 2003
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Mandated areas

Information received from the United Nations system

Joint paper on data collection and disaggregation by ethnicity

Summary

At its inaugural session, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues identified the issue of data collection and disaggregation as a topic of primary importance. It was subsequently agreed that the Inter-Agency Support Group for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues would prepare a joint United Nations paper on the topic for discussion at the second session of the Forum.

The present paper is based on discussions held at the Inter-Agency Support Group meeting, 17 and 18 February 2003, Washington, D.C. It is divided into two parts. The first provides an overview of this complex subject, pointing out some key issues relating to the collection and disaggregation of statistics in general throughout the United Nations system, and how these relate to indigenous issues. The second part gives information on how some members of the United Nations system address the question of data collection and disaggregation. To facilitate moving forward, the paper recommends an in-depth discussion with the Forum to clarify the purposes and objectives for which disaggregated statistics are needed. A possible recommendation from the Forum might be to hold an expert consultation on this subject.

* E/C.19/2003/1.

03-27677 (E) 250303

I. Issues concerning data collection and disaggregation

Introduction

1. Data collection and data disaggregation differ in some important respects. Systematic acquisition of national-level data, through population censuses or national health or education surveys, for example, is the responsibility of Governments through national bureaux of statistics and relevant sectoral ministries. The extent to which the statistics from such sources are disaggregated depends on the subject, on the types of source, on the objectives of the sources, and on the practices of different countries. Common uses of official national statistics include policy-making, implementation and evaluation, sectoral resource allocation, monitoring of trends, and targeting programme assistance. Similar uses of such statistics are made at the international level.

2. Beyond government uses, data and information collection, gathering or collation is undertaken at both national and international levels for a wide variety of purposes, and effected through such means as ad hoc surveys, research and compilations from secondary sources including published research findings, and official administrative records, for example, population registers, unemployment records, and hospital and clinic records. The quality and reliability of information from informal as well as formal sources vary widely.

3. A brief indication of the extent to which some members of the United Nations system rely on national data-collection systems, and generate and/or disaggregate statistical information themselves, and a discussion of the main purposes served by data collection and disaggregation, are given in section II of the present paper.

Data collection

4. In general, much of the aggregate statistical information used by the United Nations system is drawn from national data systems, and generally reported on a more or less regular basis. The United Nations *Statistical Yearbook* is one such regular report. Many United Nations programmes and agencies also produce annual reports on themes related to their work that contain a large amount of statistical information. Examples are the *World Development Report* produced by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report*, the World Health Organization (WHO) *World Health Report*, the International Labour Organization (ILO) *World Employment Report* and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) *State of the World's Children* report. Increasingly, the same statistics are also being made available electronically, on CD-ROMs and through Internet access to databases.

5. A large quantity of information on indigenous issues exists in some parts of the United Nations system, for example, in respect of human rights through the work of the treaty bodies, or through the monitoring work carried out on Conventions Nos. 107[1] and 169[2] by ILO. This information is communicated by Governments, and sometimes by other entities; but, as it is provided in many different forms, it is often not consistent or comparable between countries or over time within countries.[3] Nor can there normally be any independent assurance of data quality and authenticity through these means. This means that high-quality, comparable information on

indigenous issues is lacking in many areas, and this makes it difficult to produce accurate, generalizable statements in support of policies and strategies at the international level.

6. The United Nations Statistics Division indicates that there are three potential sources of data on indigenous populations, namely, censuses, surveys and administrative records. Censuses are large national operations that, for most countries, are carried out every 10 years. They remain the major source of information because of their spatial coverage of the whole country. Surveys are another common method of data collection. If well designed and executed, these can provide reliable and accurate data. Surveys may have an important role to play in the area of indigenous issues, because they are flexible and can cover a subject in greater detail than a census can. The third source is administrative records. Large amounts of statistical information are generated in countries as by-products of administration. Mechanisms for consolidating and compiling such information will have to be worked out, and efforts made to find ways of using data from different sources in a complementary manner.

7. To contribute to the effort of producing quality and reliable data from surveys, the United Nations Statistical Division is producing a handbook on designing household surveys. The subject of indigenous populations can be covered in almost any household survey, whether specialized or multi-purpose, as long as the right questions are included in the survey instruments. This is one reason that there is a need for international and national coordination of activities in this area.

8. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) underlines that the indicators on which data collection is based may not always be seen as relevant by indigenous peoples, and do not necessarily allow measurement of issues such as land loss or degree of participation in decision-making.

9. It also points to the need to combine quantitative and qualitative data and information in order to understand the process through which indigenous peoples are excluded from or discriminated against in the development process and/or the enjoyment of their human rights. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has dealt with this point in its efforts to elaborate indicators to measure the right to education (see E/C.12/1998/22). This background paper suggests the presentation of indicators in an information pyramid which starts with aggregated data which are important for monitoring and decision-making and which can be easily compared among countries (paras. 6-7).[4] These quantitative data are then complemented with qualitative data in order that the underlying causes may be understood and the problem in question contextualized. Qualitative information can be derived from programme evaluations or case studies, which allow a variety of actors, such as non-governmental organizations and international agencies, to bring in their experiences. These two important points — relevant indicators and the complementary character of quantitative and qualitative data — should form part of the discussions on data collection of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Data disaggregation

10. Some countries routinely disaggregate national population statistics by ethnicity.[5] Others do not, either for reasons linked to difficulties with definition and

terminology, or because disaggregation on the basis of ethnicity is not legally permitted or politically acceptable, as is the case for some European countries. Most large-scale data reporting exercises, for example, from national to international agencies, do not request disaggregation by ethnicity. Understanding of the fact that appropriate development responses can be achieved only on the basis of accurate, reliable data disaggregated by a number of criteria, including ethnicity, is still incomplete. The reporting requirements of measuring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals may provide an incentive for change at the national level. In addition, it would be important to recommend building the issue of ethnicity into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process in a much more systematic way than is now the case.

National capacity in developed and developing countries

11. In developed countries with indigenous populations, the advanced capacity for data collection, disaggregation and statistical analysis provides fairly clear evidence of discrepancies in socio-economic and health status between different population groups. This is often not possible in developing countries where, in addition to difficulties over terminology and the concept of ethnicity, national infrastructure, capacity and funding for data collection, analysis, and disaggregation are deficient in many sectors. Strengthening national capacity in the area of systematic data collection is a recognized priority for the technical work of many bodies and agencies of the United Nations system. Some are making considerable effort in this area. When improvements in developing-country capacity are achieved, countries will be better placed to identify differentials in the socio-economic and health status of marginalized, vulnerable and ethnic populations, including indigenous peoples.

Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals

12. Most countries of the world, and most United Nations bodies, funds and agencies, are committed to the Millennium Development Goals, which provide a common platform for action around issues of data collection and disaggregation.

13. The Millennium Development Goals reports are global and national reports (including country assessments) whose aims are to monitor progress towards achieving the Goals, to drive political support, and to serve as tools of accountability. The reports make up part of the Millennium Development Goals strategy, which includes a campaign for creating coalitions for advocacy across North and South, and a research initiative to provide a solid intellectual and analytical foundation.

14. Measuring and monitoring the achievement of the goals are a new role for the United Nations in the context of the Millennium Development Goals Global Millennium Campaign. The country assessments, coordinated by United Nations country teams, are key to ensuring the feasibility of the Goals. To be effective as vehicles of political action and accountability, these reports must go beyond averages which, while signalling overall progress, can often be misleading. Average household income, for example, must be disaggregated by gender. If it is not, the figure may not correspond to the lived realities of millions of poor women who have little or no control over money. Similarly, average declines in child mortality can

signal false progress: a 4 per cent decrease in average mortality in children under age 5 in Zimbabwe masked a rise in the number of deaths of children in the poorest fifth of the population. Country Millennium Development Goals reports with disaggregated data, undertaken as a joint enterprise with civil society, scholars and experts, can become invaluable public policy and advocacy documents.

15. Since it has been recognized that there is a need to establish nationally tailored data collection, it is critical to encourage debate at the national level regarding how data are to be obtained vis-à-vis the goals and targets. Disaggregation is therefore in the UNDP agenda; however, pushing for information on indigenous peoples can be difficult owing to political tensions.

Forum requirements

16. To facilitate decisions on how to proceed, it will be helpful for the Forum to clarify further the specific goals and objectives to which data disaggregation is expected to contribute. A detailed discussion on this question during the current session of the Forum may be the best way forward.

17. This discussion could usefully include consideration of the extent to which national reporting exercises in respect of the Millennium Development Goals can contribute to filling data gaps and improving national machinery for data collection. In addition, the discussion could consider whether the country-level Millennium Development Goals reporting system can feasibly include a component in respect of ethnicity. UNICEF is of the opinion that this would be possible. The question what the role of the Forum should be in relation to the Millennium Development Goals might also be addressed.

Conclusion

18. Currently, fairly reliable data are available from most developed countries with indigenous populations, and from some developing countries on some subjects. There is a paucity of reliable national-level data on all topics in many developing countries owing, inter alia to weak national statistical capacity, conceptual differences over the term "indigenous", or inadequate attention to indigenous issues. In some countries, representatives of indigenous populations and government authorities disagree over the accuracy of reported statistics. In both developed and developing countries, research, surveys and other methods of data collection generate a wealth of information of varying degrees of reliability. Some initiatives under way within the United Nations system may help rectify the situation in the medium-to-long term.

19. In sum, it appears that more substantive work may be necessary before definitive recommendations on the subject are made. The goal should be to collect data on indigenous issues that are as complete and reliable as possible. In this regard, a detailed review of the current status of data availability is needed, followed by decisions on strategies for further work.

20. At the level of the United Nations system, there are technical difficulties in relation to quality, comparison, disaggregation and generalness of data; resource difficulties in relation to the size and complexity of addressing this task; political

difficulties linked to the willingness or ability of States to go deeply into the question of data; and uncertainty over the benefits of data-seeking at the global level.

II. Data production and use within the United Nations system

21. A brief overview of how some members of the United Nations system currently produce and use data is given below. It addresses issues such as:

(a) National or international instruments habitually used to collect or obtain data;

(b) The extent to which such data are disaggregated by ethnicity;

(c) Whether independent data are produced by the agency, according to what criteria they are disaggregated, and the extent of their reliability.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

22. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) collects data that are mainly related to its areas of expertise: sustainable agriculture and rural development, food security, forestry and fisheries. The collection of data at the national level is carried out through FAO technical assistance support to the production of agricultural censuses, or specific statistics on subjects of concern. On a more disaggregated level (regional or local), FAO collects specific data related to project purposes, both through task-oriented field surveys and through available secondary data sources. As indigenous peoples are part of the FAO vulnerable target population, disaggregated data related to this particular group is mainly embedded in the collected data related to vulnerable groups.

23. Currently, FAO has one initiative related to disaggregated data on indigenous populations. The objective of this activity, which is carried out jointly with the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), is to develop a set of "cultural indicators" or tools for measuring the suitability and appropriateness of agriculture and rural development activities and approaches in the best interests of indigenous peoples. This activity will be carried out in a participatory way, involving consultation and participation of indigenous peoples in the selection and development of the set of cultural indicators.

24. In addition, some FAO projects based in countries and areas with a large indigenous population have some data on the indigenous peoples living in the project area. In particular, technical assistance projects that work on natural resources management, genetic resources, nutrition, food security and land tenure in communal land very often include a description and analysis of the targeted population living in the project area.

International Labour Office

25. Most of the aggregate statistics, for example, on employment, unemployment, hours of work, wages, occupational injuries and strikes and lockouts that the International Labour Office gathers from national Governments are presented on the

web site http://laborsta.ilo.org from which users can print tables or download statistics to electronic spreadsheets. Links to relevant metadata are provided. "Ethnic group" is not among the descriptive variables for which statistics are now requested from countries.

26. Recently, certain ILO programmes have started to archive microdata files from sponsored or commissioned household surveys, namely, the child labour surveys carried out as part of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the People Security Surveys (PSS) carried out on the initiative of the InFocus Programme on Socio-Economic Security (IFP/SES). Depending on the specific national circumstances, some of the latter surveys have included a variable for "ethnic group".

27. Beyond the formal statistics-gathering mechanisms, many government reports on the application of conventions (particularly Conventions Nos. 107 and 169 but sometimes also other conventions) include statistical data relevant to the situation of indigenous peoples in their countries. While this information is public, there are at present insufficient resources to compile and publish it.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights[6]

28. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights undertakes no systematic statistical surveys in relation to human rights. Data relating to indigenous peoples are received through several mechanisms, in particular as provided by Governments in their reporting to treaty bodies or else by Special Rapporteurs who undertake official country missions.

29. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations is an important focal point in the system where, under its review-of-developments mandate, information on the situation of indigenous peoples worldwide is collected. Non-governmental organizations, indigenous communities, Governments and international agencies contribute with qualitative and quantitative data under this item, but such material would probably not be suitable for comparative analysis.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

30. National and regional Human Development Reports have been produced in over 135 countries. These policy advocacy documents, supported by UNDP, aim to take stock of the human development situation in a country and, through their alternative people-centred analysis and recommendations, to stimulate public debate and the directing of political attention to a nation's most pressing development priorities.

31. One critical feature of human development analysis is examination of trends in the major human development dimensions at the lowest possible levels of disaggregation. Regional and national Human Development Reports have included data disaggregated by ethnic groupings, language groupings, gender, geographical regions (including down to the very local level of municipality), age and many other groupings. Through disaggregated data, both quantitative and qualitative, these reports are able to better identify disparities and pockets of deprivation and

discrimination, and formulate policies to address these constraints on human development progress.

32. National Human Development Reports are both users of data from national statistical offices and other non-governmental sources such as research institutes, and producers of data, especially in the area of qualitative data that attempt to capture peoples' voices concerning in issues involving perceptions and aspirations etc. UNDP, in a number of cases, is supporting this data collection.

33. Some examples include:

(a) **Nepal National Human Development Report, 2001** on poverty reduction and governance. In attempting to analyse underlying structural issues that are hampering the Government's poverty reduction strategies, the report presents data disaggregated by caste and ethnic group in Nepal for health outcome indicators;

(b) **Guatemala National Human Development Report, 2000** entitled *La Fuerza Incluyente del Desarrollo Humano*, focused on issues related to economic, judicial and social exclusion. Key to analysing how various dimensions of exclusion have impeded development in Guatemala were data disaggregated by ethnicity (indigenous and non-indigenous), language spoken, gender, age, and geography;

(c) **Namibia National Human Development Reports**. Since 1996, Namibia has been producing National Human Development Reports, which present both the human development index and the human poverty index disaggregated by language groupings. Through analysis of these data, Namibia is able to identify structural inequities by ethnic group. Such identification has contributed to planning and resource allocation aimed at addressing these inequalities;

(d) **Roma report**. The 2002 *Roma Regional Human Development Report: Avoiding the Dependency Trap* (UNDP, 2002) presents the findings of the first comprehensive quantitative survey of the Roma minority in five Central and Eastern European States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia), conducted by UNDP and ILO. The report calls for policies in all five countries to address major shortcomings in employment opportunities, access to education and participation in government. It states that, without early efforts at integration, "the human security costs of exclusion will spiral, potentially resulting in political extremism and setbacks to the democratic process".

34. There is a proposal that an Asian regional Human Development Report focusing on indigenous peoples be prepared in the next two to three years.

35. The proposed topic for the global *Human Development Report*, 2004 is "Cultural diversity and human development".

36. As countries begin to systematically benchmark progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the disaggregated data prepared for and presented in National Human Development Reports will become increasingly valuable as a means for taking a rights-based approach to the achievement of the Goals. As national averages mask great disparities, National Human Development Reports can provide the data and statistics that help to explain uneven progress in survival and health, knowledge and education, income and standard of living, participation and freedom, and may serve to highlight aspects of political and economic marginalization that could lead to strife if they are not addressed.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

37. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has the global mandate to monitor progress towards the implementation of the Habitat Agenda[7] and the Millennium Development Goal on slums (Goal 7, target 11) (see A/56/326, annex), and to monitor and evaluate global urban conditions and trends. In order to do so, UN-Habitat has engaged in producing city-level information in the area of shelter, services, infrastructure, socio-economic development, environmental management and governance, covering the key areas of the Habitat Agenda. In particular, data are collected on housing rights and impediments encountered by particular groups (ethnic or other types of groups) in owning and inheriting land and housing. These data are collected in a global representative sample of cities and compiled in the Global Urban Indicators Database (http://www.unhabitat.org/programmes/guo/).

38. UN-Habitat has recently engaged in carrying out a set of households surveys in order to provide intra-city-level information. The prime interest of UN-Habitat is in disaggregating information by slum and non-slum areas in urban contexts, as well as by sex and age. Locally specific ethnic disaggregation will be considered in forthcoming targeted households surveys in order to reveal the ethnic divide among the urban poor, in slum and non-slum areas, particularly in terms of access to services and security of tenure.

39. The United Nations Housing Rights Programme — which is implemented jointly by UN-Habitat and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights — is currently undertaking a study on indigenous peoples' right to housing. The study is expected to be completed by the end of 2003.

40. The objective of the study is to identify the current status of, obstacles to and practical solutions for greater protection and promotion of housing rights of indigenous people. Specific attention will be paid to the various elements of the right to adequate housing, such as security of tenure, accessibility, affordability and cultural adequacy, which will be analysed in the context of indigenous people. The principles of equality and non-discrimination will be linked to each of these elements throughout the research. The study will provide a compilation of information, an analysis of the existing situation and a forward-looking perspective on actions at various levels that can contribute to improvements in the lives of indigenous people, particularly indigenous women.

41. During the course of the study, available disaggregated statistical data on indigenous peoples and related information will be compiled and analysed vis-à-vis the rest of the population to provide an overall picture on the discrimination/exclusion confronted by indigenous peoples.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

42. UNICEF is very active in the collection of data, both at the national and at the international level. At the international level, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) enables UNICEF to collect independent data through questionnaires given to a representative sample of the population in a given country. The purpose of such data has been to evaluate achievements made with regard to the goals set forth at the World Summit for Children in 1990, and will now concentrate on reporting progress

on commitments made at the special session of the General Assembly on children held in 2002. Data focus on health, nutrition, maternal health, human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), water and sanitation, education and other child rights. At the national level, UNICEF country offices support national authorities, in particular ministries of health, education and family affairs, in the collection of data with a view to analysing the country situation and informing the design and implementation of policies. Other data sources include WHO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) etc. The results of data collection and analysis are widely published and shared with counterparts and gathered every year in the *State of the World's Children* report (see http://www.childinfo.org).

43. While data are generally disaggregated by age, gender, rural or urban residence, family size and household wealth status, it has not so far been disaggregated by ethnicity or indigenous origin. Future rounds of the MICS, the DHS and other surveys could possibly include a question on ethnicity which would assist disaggregation of data on this criterion.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat: United Nations Statistics Division

44. The United Nations Statistics Division has basic statistics on ethnicity which in 1993 were published in the *Demographic Yearbook*. This information was disaggregated by sex. There are plans to publish information on ethnicity in 2004. In addition, the Division will shortly be acquiring a statistician who will concentrate on work related to indigenous populations and related issues. The work will involve review of data collection in this area, concepts, definitions, and evaluation of data sources with commentaries on comparability. The Division intends to assemble and review metadata from countries and develop statistical profiles. As indicated earlier in this paper, the Division is producing a handbook on designing household surveys. For more extensive information on the Division, please refer to its web site (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/). It provides information on various statistical issues that may be relevant to ethnicity.

World Health Organization (WHO)

45. Until recently, WHO relied primarily on national health survey statistics reported annually by member States. This aggregate data supplied, inter alia, the vital statistics published in the *United Nations Statistical Yearbook*. WHO is now producing an independent health survey instrument to facilitate the production of comparable health statistics worldwide. The survey instrument, which includes questions on ethnic origin and mother tongue(s), comprises a number of core components, to which others can be added according to the health profile and demographic composition of the user country. Interested member States could, for example, request the addition of a component to address issues of health and ethnicity.

46. Other major sources of data within WHO are derived from major research programmes such as that on reproductive health, and from the UNDP/World

Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases. Depending on geographical location, individual studies may address questions of ethnicity. The most common criteria by which data are disaggregated in research supported by WHO are age, sex, educational level, rural/urban residence, and income.

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

47. A considerable amount of statistical information is available in the country health profiles that the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has built up for countries of its region. These comprise information from the Core Health Data System, last updated in 2001. The profiles cover the following: socio-economic, political and demographic overview; mortality profile; analysis by population group; communicable diseases; non-communicable diseases and other health-related problems; national health plans and policies; organization of health services; research and technology; surveillance and data systems; expenditures and sectoral financing; and technical and financial external cooperation. Particular emphasis is placed on infant, maternal and perinatal mortality. See http://www.paho.org for further details.

Notes

[1] Convention concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries (No. 107) (see International Labour Organization, *International Labour Conventions and Recommendations* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1996), vol. III).

[2] Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (No. 169) (see International Labour Organization, *International Labour Conventions and Recommendations* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1996), vol. III).

[3] Given the definitional issues in relation to indigenous peoples, which countries approach in different ways, international comparisons may not necessarily be meaningful.

[4] This is the case if common measurement criteria have been used across all countries.

[5] In 2001, WHO ascertained that the following countries routinely disaggregate national population statistics by ethnicity: Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Greenland, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru, Russian Federation, South Africa, United States of America and Viet Nam. This should not be considered an exhaustive list: other countries, from which information could not be obtained at that time, may also routinely disaggregate population data by ethnicity.

[6] Note based on a discussion with Grace Bediako, United Nations Statistics Division, 13 February 2003.

[7] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.IV.6), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.